

Youth and Patriotism in Zambia: Is Voting the Only way to Show Patriotism?

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the level of patriotism among youths in Zambia and to establish whether voting was the only way to show patriotism among the youths. This study employed a qualitative approach to generate data because the views and opinions of the youths in Zambia were sought. A descriptive survey research design was used. The target population were all youths in Zambia. The sample consisted of 50 youths and 5 senior citizens who were purposively selected. 20 youths and 5 senior citizens were subjected to interviews and 30 youths were subjected to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), thus 5 FGDs comprising of 6 members were used to gather data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The key findings were that youth were able to define patriotism though this appeared rhetoric. Voting was not the only way to show patriotism but just one of the ways patriotism may be expressed. Patriotism had to do with the emotional attachment to a nation. The spirit of patriotism should be rooted in the ideas that gave birth to a nation. Based on the findings, this study recommends to the government through the Ministry of Education to strengthen patriotic values in schools and this should begin at kindergarten. Civil Society Organizations in Zambia should come up with awareness programmes targeted at the youths on patriotism.

Key Words: Patriotism; Youth; Voting; Globalisation

Introduction

Youths are key to any future development of the nation because they are the future leaders. It is therefore imperative that the youth have a high sense of love for their country so that the future generation that lies ahead of them has a clear development agenda. However, in Zambia, this is an opportunity that is slowly eroding. For instance, the then Republican President of Zambia in 2019 at a state of the nation address appealed to the Zambians to show patriotism to the nation by speaking well about the nation. Furthermore, Mukunto (2019) documented the unpatriotic behavior of the Zambian youth which included electoral violence, public disorder, vandalism, lawlessness and aggressive rhetoric. It appears most youths do not really understand and appreciate the concept of patriotism. This seems to be a general picture among youths worldwide

especially those born after independence struggle as they do not understand their history to independence. Independence in this sense serves as a peak for achieving the spirit of patriotism in all colonies. Since patriotism is decreasing over time among the youths in Zambia as shown in studies by Magasu, Banda and Muleya (2020); Mukunto (2019), it has become necessary to conduct this research to determine the level of patriotism among the youths.

i. Who is a Youth?

The definition of a youth varies from country to country or from organization to organization. The United Nations defines a youth as a young male or female aged between 15 and 24 years, while the commonwealth youth programme defines a youth as a male or female aged between 15 and 29. According to the 2015 National Youth Policy of Zambia, a youth is defined as a male or female person aged between 18 and 35 years. This definition is also in line with the African Youth Charter.

ii. What is Patriotism?

According to Mohamed, Sulaiman, Othman, Yang and Haron (2011), patriotism originates from a Greek word which is 'patriots' which means friends from the same country and 'Patrice' which means native land. In Arabic, patriotism is represented by the word 'Wataniah' which means matters relating to the motherland. According to Richey (2011), patriotism has two dimensions. Thus, blind and constructive patriotism. Blind patriotism is associated authoritarianism and nationalism (Barnes (2010); Orturk, Malkoc and Ersoy (2016) while constructive patriotism is associated with the critical approach to national issues. Critical approach to issues according to Magasu (2021) entails the ability to analyse, evaluate, take and defend a position on public issues and to use knowledge to participate in civic and political processes. Blind patriotism ignores subgroups in society and can be regarded as dictatorial whereas constructive patriotism is democratic and embraces everybody, within and outside the nation. It also entails that the spirit of patriotism is subjective. It is subjective because it depends on personal feelings, and on personal understanding of the group interest (Basir and Bakar, 2020). This means that individuals differ in their perceptions of society's interest and values.

According to Bar-Tal and Staub (1997), patriotism reflects a positive evaluation of and emotion towards the group and its territory, and is expressed in belief and feelings connoting love, pride,

loyalty, devotion, commitment and care. This means that patriotism implies behaviors that benefit the group. Furthermore, this entails that patriotism has both affective and cognitive elements such as commitment, concern, identification, attachment, devotion and love, as well as the intention to benefit the group and country, which in times of need must be expressed in action (Bar-Tal and Staub, 1997).

Brubaker (2004) in Basir and Bakar (2020), emphasized that patriotism can be valuable in four aspects that can help develop a more populist nationality, provide support for social policies, foster integration and also serve as an examination of foreign policy development. This means that patriotism is a positive feeling about love, devotion, pride and duty to support and protect the nation. It is also clear that the concept of patriotism was evolving in line with global trends. The earlier definitions restricted the concept to territorial boundaries but this is not the case anymore.

Hammorad (2016) defines patriotism in the globalization era as not only love of the nation but love of love of other regions and other countries by mutual respect, tolerance and always thrive to keep peace in the world. However, one would argue that patriotism should first begin with love of your nation if it was to make sense. But the question is, 'How do you show love to your country?' There were many ways a person can show love to his/her nation and voting is just one way. Loving the nation means taking keen interest in the affairs of the nation for the common good. According to Reed (2003), patriotism is not blind trust in anything our leaders tell us and is not simply showing up to vote. This means that patriotism is what motivates a citizen to participate in national affairs. The extent to which citizens engage with national affairs determines the level of patriotism. On the other hand, Lungu (2019), defines patriotism as a lifelong commitment by each one to make the country a better place.

From a Civic Education Perspective, as noted by Magasu, Muleya and Mweemba (2020); Ozturk, Malkov and Ersay (2016), citizens who have gained the value of patriotism are important for any society. This is because patriotism has to do with the feelings of belonging, love, pride and caring for a nation on one hand, and on the other hand, it implies loyalty to the country without emphasizing ethical attributes. It is clear from the arguments by scholars above that while patriotism defines an individual loyalty to a nation, it also constitutes a political referent

for it at the same time. But the question is, ‘What is the understanding of the concept of patriotism to a youth in Zambia today?’

iii. Patriotism and Youth Engagement

For the past 20 years, researchers have argued that there is a crisis in young people’s civic and political engagement, youths who are eligible to vote in national elections tend to do so less frequently than older generations (Barrett, 2018). However, the 12th August, 2021 General Elections in Zambia were historical in the sense that the majority of the youths went to cast their votes to change the government. Most youths were dissatisfied with the government’s failure to address their plight. If viewed from a perspective of patriotism, it cannot be denied that the actions of the youth in this matter signified true patriots. Platon (2016) in Marchenoka (2020) quotes the Greek philosopher Plato as having stated that “a patriot is not just a warrior, it is a person, who applies his/her abilities for improvement of society’s life, its citizens, for achieving stability aiming at elevating of the state.” But the question one would ask would be: Is voting the only way of showing patriotism? To answer this fundamental question, Reed (2003) argues that patriotism is not simply voting. Patriotism is what motivates a voter to vote. If patriotism means the motive to vote, then one would argue that the action by youths in Zambia on the 12th of August was patriotism. It was a way of showing dissatisfaction in the manner national affairs were being handled. Changes in the way national affairs are run is needed to respond to what the youth want. Additionally, leaders must also identify new challenges faced by youth such as unemployment so that they help them. Youths should be given space to participate in national matters, and any ideas or opinions by the youths which are accepted and applied by the government will make them feel more appreciated and that they can actually afford to contribute something to the development of the country, this will stimulate patriotism. Efforts to foster patriotism in the youth should consider current development factors so that they were appropriate with the current wants and needs. To a young, patriotism should be seen as a devotion to and vigorous support for one’s nation.

Patriotism was generally affected by social habits, policies, religion and education in a particular nation. For instance, if the education system in a country is producing passive citizens who cannot think for themselves, then the youth will be less or non-patriotic, but, if the system is producing learners who are active, participative and critical thinkers, the youth will be patriotic.

Furthermore, education should provide awareness of citizenship through teaching the history of a nation so that the youth are able to make informed and rational decisions as citizens of a democratic society in an independent global world. According to Mahamed, Sulaiman, Othman, Yang and Haron (2011) youths have to understand the history of the country in various ways so that they understand better what happened in their country and this has to be instilled from the early stages of life.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to generate data because it targeted for an in-depth indulgence in the issue under analysis on patriotism and youth in Zambia. A descriptive survey research design was used. The target population were all youths in Zambia. The sample consisted of 5 senior citizens and 50 youths who were purposively selected from across the ten provinces of Zambia so that the findings could be generalized. 5 senior citizens and 20 youths were subjected to interviews and 30 youths were subjected to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), thus 5 FGDs comprising of 6 members were used to gather data. A pilot study was conducted for the so purpose of validating the instruments. The researchers were guided by the principles guiding ethical research in social sciences. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data.

Presentation of the Findings

This study was exclusively devoted to establishing patriotism among the youths in Zambia and to ascertain whether voting was the only way to determine patriotism. Four main themes were used to answer the research questions. These themes are: Meaning of patriotism, Importance of patriotism, How to be patriotic and importance of national days.

Theme 1: Meaning of Patriotism

When the youths were asked to define patriotism, it was clear from the answers that patriotism was limited to national boundaries. There was no mention of patriotism that goes beyond the national boundaries. One youth defined patriotism as:

Feeling of love among the citizens of a country

Another youth defined the concept as:

Showing loyalty, love, dedication and unit of oneness in the country

Another one defined patriotism as:

The feeling of attachment and commitment of love to a country

Patriotism was also defined as:

Keeping the national flag flying high and showing respect

When the senior citizens were asked to define patriotism, the term brought memories for the struggle of independence. This is what one senior citizen said:

Patriotism means dying for your country. We fought the colonialists at the expense of our lives. Some of our friends are not here today because of the struggle for independence. The freedom you are enjoying today came at a huge cost

Theme 2: Importance of Patriotism

The youths were also asked to explain the importance of patriotism. One youth had the following explanation:

Patriotism was important because it showed the unity among the youths

Another one explained:

Patriotism is important because it helps to serve the country honestly with passion

Another one had the following explanation:

It helps to identify and understand the ideas that the nation holds

The other one had this to say:

Patriotism promotes public sacrifice that is crucial in the functioning of the nation

Theme 3: How to be Patriotic

All the participants mentioned voting as one way of showing patriotism. This is what one youth stated:

Voting is being patriotic. The main reason why I voted was to change government. I realized the government did not take the plight of the youths seriously

Others from those who were interviewed (12) indicated that they were patriotic because they were able to sing the national anthem. However, when asked to sing the national anthem, they failed to sing all the verses.

The senior citizens were also asked to state whether youths of today were patriotic. All the senior citizens indicated that they did not see any patriotism in the youths today. This is what one senior citizen said:

Youths of nowadays are far from being patriotic. During our days we used to celebrate our independence with passion. It was a special day for us. We had to wear new clothes as a reminder of our independence. There were celebrations all over including schools. Today, the celebration has been left to government officials and freedom fighters

Another senior citizen had this to say:

During our years as youths we used to sing the national anthem with passion and meaning. We all knew how to seeing the national anthem and not this generation of social media. Whenever, the national anthem was being sang, we would stand still up to the end as a sign of patriotism. Youths today have lost it

Theme 4: Importance of National Days

One asked to state the importance of national days. All the youths indicated that it was important to show respect to freedom fighter. This is what one youth said:

It shows respect to freedom fighters who gave their lives to fight for freedom

Another one explained:

Independence Day reminds us of the struggle our forefathers went through

Discussion of the Findings

From the findings, all the youths were aware and know what patriotism is. It was also clear from the definitions they gave on patriotism that it defined one's love and affection for a country. This understanding of patriotism according to Bar-Tal and Staub (2008) carries a positive value that leads to behavioral attachments such as emotion, love, obedience, commitment and willingness to fight for national security. This attachment can be a combination of many different feelings, language relating to one's own homeland, including ethnic, cultural, political or historical aspects. Therefore, demonstrating patriotism is one of the necessities of being a citizen. However, according to studies by Magasu, Banda and Muleya (2020); Mukunto (2019), youths in Zambia were being used as tools of electoral violence. This behavior does not reflect patriotism. This also goes to show that may be the definitions they gave about patriotism were just rhetoric in that they lacked emotional attachment to the love of the country. The youths were just interested in personal gain and not the good of everyone. This was despite the national youth policy in Zambia to enhance youth patriotism.

Therefore, it is important for the government to strengthen patriotic values if the youths are to be a productive generation in future. This can be done by implementing civic and moral values in schools right at the early age in pre-schools. The young need to learn the history of their country so that they are able to see where they come from in terms of the struggle for independence. This will help instill a sense of love and belonging. In Zambia, the youths need to learn about Kenneth David Kaunda, Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe, Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula, Mainza Chona, Godwin Mbikusita Lewanika and others who shed blood to have Zambia a sovereign state. The youths today owe those of the past who sacrificed and even died to build us a free nation. Therefore, the youths can honour them by being patriotic. There were various ways youths could show patriotism. For instance, through singing the national anthem with passion, respecting the symbols of national identity such as the National Flag, obeying laws, paying tax, participating in voting and many more.

Another interesting thing emanating from the definitions was that there was no mention or link to globalization. This could be an indication that patriotism under globalization loses meaning. This is because the spirit of patriotism is seen as one of the important mediums in ensuring the security, sovereignty and harmony of a country. However, this is not to say the youths in Zambia have not embraced globalization. In fact, youths today are regarded as a generation of technology

where communication is not limited to territorial boundaries. Lack of knowledge about other cultures may hinder patriotism. Youths need to know, understand and appreciate the values of different races, ethnic groups and cultures without compromising their traditions, cultures and religious beliefs. Nations need their youths and the youths need their nations.

It was also established from the findings that youths regarded voting as prime of patriotism “but patriotism is not simply showing up to vote (Reed, 2003:14).” The implication is that patriotism has an emotional attachment to action. Arguably, what motivated someone to go and cast a vote is what constitutes the concept of patriotism. In this sense, the reason for casting a vote should be based on moral good, and for the benefit of the nation and not for personal selfish interest. Patriotism is not a mere outward sign like singing of the national anthem, celebrating the Independence Day and so on. This means that patriotism cannot be reduced to a mere sign or gesture. Patriotism should be rooted in the ideas that gave birth to a nation. It is therefore, the right of the citizens in a democratic nation to rid themselves of a government that departs from the ideals of the founders of the nation.

Conclusion

Youths in any state are key because they are the future leaders and therefore, patriotism can no longer be regarded as a mere rhetoric. The spirit of patriotism lied in the feeling of love and affection for a nation. Therefore, there was need to strengthen the spirit of patriotism so that the youths did not indulge themselves in anti-social behaviours. Voting was one but not limited to patriotism. Essentially, the spirit of patriotism should be rooted in the ideas that gave birth to a nation.

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